

God's Intervention in Mary's Life

Luke 1:26-38

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How do you respond to interruptions? How do you react when you when someone or something disrupts what you're doing? Some interruptions irritate us like a dog barking while we're sleeping or a sibling shooting elastics at us while we study or someone talking during the movie. Some interruptions bring us joy like a package arriving in the mail (as long as it's not ticking inside); a new car wrapped with a ribbon in the driveway; the safe arrival of good friends or family who visit from out of town. Some interruptions cause necessary movement like an intervention for an addicted or sick person; or a message from God about His plans and will for our lives.

How do you respond when God interrupts your life? How do you react when it seems He's saying something that requires an adjustment or altering of your plans? Maybe He speaks to you through a song; through the words of another person; through a message; through a reading from the Bible. Maybe He speaks in your conscience about your need to stop doing something or to start talking to someone. Maybe He has opened a door that you need to walk through or closed a door that you need to accept. Maybe He calls you to take a major step of faith and leave your comfort zone to follow Him to something new.

Today, we will follow the story of someone whose life God interrupted in a major way. God chose this person to play a crucial part in His redemptive plan. We will see God's activity and initiation. And we'll also see how the person responded. Then we'll consider our attention to and response towards God's interruptions in our lives. This person is named Mary and we find this interruption in Scripture. In **Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with

God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.¹

Mary was likely somewhere between 12 or 15 years old. In our world, she would be in Junior High and have 4 to 5 years of schooling left. Then she might go to NAIT or MacEwan or the U of A. If she lived today and thought marriage might be in her future, it would be about 8-10 years down the road. She would have a lot to accomplish and experience before she would enter into something like that.

But in the first century in small Jewish villages like Nazareth, girls did not go to school. The widespread poverty required families to try to get their daughters married off at a young age. That way, the family could receive a dowry or payment for the bride that would help them survive. And it would mean one less mouth to feed. The “husband to be” would feed take responsibility for the daughter. Parents often arranged the marriages of their children. A young man’s parents would approach a bride’s parents for discussions. So the bride and groom to be might first meet at the betrothal ceremony or at least they might first meet as a couple at that ceremony. Girls, can you imagine at the age of 12, 13 or 14, being told who you were going to marry?

The betrothal period lasted about a year similar to our engagement time today. But though we take engagements seriously, they are not legally binding. But in Jewish communities of the first century, betrothals established the marital relationship. This time frame allowed the groom to prepare a house for his new bride. They could have no physical relationship during their betrothal. This would ensure she was not pregnant by another. The penalty for pregnancy during a betrothal was at minimum divorce and shame upon the girl and her family. There was also a provision in the law that allowed for the stoning or execution of a woman who became pregnant while betrothed. But if all was well, when the wedding day came, he would bring her into the house he’d prepared.

So Mary has already gone through a betrothal ceremony. We don’t know whether she knew Joseph before. Luke tells us Joseph was from the line of King David. Their families lived in a little village called Nazareth way up in north western Israel far removed from the capital city of Jerusalem.

¹ [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#)

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Mary likely expected a hard life. The Romans ruled by military occupation of the land. They taxed the people for the empire's treasury. Then there was King Herod who ruled under the Romans but over the people. He also taxed the people mostly so he could build up the capital and his own great palaces with waterfalls and pools. This taxation did not allow the peasants to advance much in life. So they lived in a cycle of survival hoping to keep enough food to feed their families through another season. The local rabbi would remind them of their hope for a Messiah – a deliverer of some sort who would restore their nation and bring them back to something like the golden days of David.

Maybe Mary looked forward with the joy, energy and anticipation of youth. Hope and joy is one of the many great attributes of young people. They are sometimes wonderfully naïve to the hardships of life and just take them on. She maybe looked forward to becoming a mom and having kids and running a house. She likely anticipated a life not much different than she had grown up with.

But one day, the Lord's angel Gabriel comes to visit her. Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God goes to this obscure village to visit an ordinary girl. We don't know what he looked like. We do know that Mary's relative Zechariah saw Gabriel and he was afraid. Perhaps there was something awesome and a little scary about his appearance. We're not told Mary shows any fear about Gabriel's appearance.

But she hears these words – "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Now there's nothing in this greeting about Mary being an extra-ordinary person or that she has some measure of grace greater than anyone else. Some translate Luke 1:28 as "Hail Mary, full of grace." But Gabriel actually reveals she is a recipient of favor or grace. Gabriel communicates that God favors her and that the Lord is with her.

If an angel came to visit you and told you "God has highly favored you," how might you respond? I think I would find that encouraging. I might be awestruck but I think I'd really appreciate it. But Luke tells us Mary is troubled in verse 29. She's not only troubled. She's *greatly* troubled and tries to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

Why? Amidst many possible explanations, it seems that she couldn't understand the favor because she was so ordinary. Only the privileged, wealthy and powerful got favor at that time. She was one young Jewish girl among thousands. She was like all of them as they carried on their lives in other little known villages in other parts of the country. She was no princess. She had no wealth. She had no power. She had no special talent that we know about.

She was just a girl in the most humble of circumstances. Yet, she is favored by God for He knew the character of this girl and the likelihood of her embracing this call.

Gabriel senses Mary's discomfort which shows up like fear. So the angel speaks to her with reassurance. "Don't be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God." God interrupts her life but as He's doing it, He comforts and assures her. She'll need it for the biggest news is about to be unveiled. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." Mary is going to have a baby boy. She is to give to him the name Jesus. At this point there's not much surprise in this announcement. Mary is already betrothed. She anticipates having a family with Joseph. And the name Jesus – it was a very common one in those days. It reminded of the Hebrew Yeshua or Joshua – the Lord is salvation. Her people certainly needed salvation.

But Gabriel's next words reveal this boy would be no ordinary child nor would it be an ordinary conception. "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Son of the Most High was a divine title reserved for a Son of God. A king who reigns forever could only be divine. The rabbis promised that one day a deliverer would arise from the house of David. But did they understand that those Old Testament prophecies were not about a human king but one who would come from God Himself? Mary would bear the deliverer for which her family hoped. She would give birth to the messiah that her forefathers anticipated. Little Mary from the unknown village of Nazareth would bring forth a son who would become the nation's deliverer. God would fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament. The Lord was coming for His people.

But as if often the case when God interrupts one's life, some major adjustments were required of Mary to willingly embrace God's plan. Somehow, she realizes that Gabriel is not talking about a baby coming from her pending marriage with Joseph. She will soon be pregnant. But she has never been with a man. How can Gabriel's words be true since she is a virgin? So she asks how this is possible.

Gabriel answers with reverence and dignity. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God." God would show his power over human reproduction. The word overshadow is related to the same word used to describe the cloud that overshadowed Israel's tabernacle in the desert. When the cloud overshadowed it meant God was present. The same

word describes the cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Moses and Elijah during the transfiguration. In Mary's life, the overshadowing of God would result in miraculous conception. It would be a most holy event. There is no god mating with human woman like some pagan myths. God would overshadow and perform an incredible miracle so that the child will be called holy – the Son of God.

Yet the angel provides further assurance. "And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren." Gabriel announces that God has already demonstrated His sovereignty over human reproduction in the life of Mary's relative Elizabeth. Here was assurance that God could do what He said He would do. In fact Gabriel declared, "For nothing will be impossible with God." When God decides on a course of action, nothing stops Him. No obstacle stands in His way that cannot be overcome. Nothing frustrates His plans so He has to go to plan B.

By this virgin conception, God ensures that the coming of His Son will be like no other. The virgin conception made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person. It also makes possible Christ's true humanity without somehow inheriting the sin nature. The virgin conception sets Jesus apart from every other human ever born. So then He could serve as the unblemished lamb, the substitutionary sacrifice on the cross for all of humankind. He would be born holy, the Son of God. He was born holy. He would live a perfectly holy life. This Holy One bore our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states "For our sake, God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The virgin conception will set Jesus' life on a trajectory that will lead to the cross, tomb and resurrection.

Mary began that day an ordinary betrothed girl in an unknown village looking forward to a hard life with some happiness. She now knows God has favoured her and she will conceive through the Holy Spirit's miraculous work. This Son will be the world's deliverer.

Now look at how many ways God took the initiative in this passage. He sends Gabriel to Nazareth in Galilee to a girl betrothed to one from the tribe of David. He provided for her fear and announced the coming of His holy Son. He would provide the miraculous conception through the work of the Holy Spirit. He provided the assurance of His sovereignty over reproduction with the news about Zechariah and Elizabeth.

This interruption would require major adjustments in her life. She would likely experience confusion and tension with Joseph when he found out about her pregnancy. The interruption required her to make a long difficult journey in the late stages of her pregnancy she would give birth without her mother and other midwives of the community to help her. She would get visited by wisemen from the east. She and Joseph would be forced to flee into the desert and go down to Egypt. Eventually she would return to Israel and go back to her village with Joseph and the child. She would experience 3 days wondering about his survival when he was 12 and they couldn't find him. She would have to adjust to the death of her husband and the public ministry of her son where he was away for long periods of time. She would at times feel he was overwhelmed and try to get at him through the crowds. She was at the cross witnessing His unjust conviction, sentence and suffering. She would grieve his death. Then she would see Him resurrected and witness his ascension into heaven. The course of her life would change forever after this visit from Gabriel. Though there must have been times of struggle, at this moment she responds with great faith. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word." And Gabriel departed. And we have life eternal today because of her son. God's intervention in her life brought us life.

So what if God wants to bring life to someone else through your life? What if God wants to give you the life He has for you – the life that's good for you – the life He created you to live? But it will require some adjustments and change. How willing are we to adjust to His interruptions? Would we respond with humility and obedience like Mary did?

God has interrupted lives throughout history to accomplish His good purposes. Sometimes his interruptions recalibrate our lives in a very short period of time for a long term impact.

Like Rebekah – who one day went to get water by the well and met a man from a distant country whose camels needed water. By the end of the day, he had given her multiple gifts and invited her to come back to his country with him to marry someone she'd never met. She had to decide that night and would likely never see her family again.

God interrupted the life of a cocky 17 year old named Joseph who enjoyed his father's favoritism and telling on his brothers. But in a day he was sold as slave and taken away to Egypt.

God intervened in the life of a woman named Esther who won a beauty contest and now enjoyed the status of queen of the Persian Emperor. But God called her to risk everything by going into the king unannounced risking her own execution in an attempt to save her people.

God intervened in Hosea's life who one day was a faithful prophet to the Lord and envisioned marrying a woman who would prayerfully and practically support him in this challenging calling. The next day God commanded him to marry a woman he knew would be unfaithful to him yet would display God's message to a lost people.

God interrupted Daniel's life who one day was a Jewish boy going about his everyday life in Jerusalem. But within weeks was taken as captive to Babylon to serve in the Babylonian court.

Some struggled with the interruption. All eventually embraced it and through their humility and obedience, God's plans advanced and God's good was accomplished.

Rebekah became mother of Jacob who was the father of the 12 tribes. Joseph became second in command to Pharaoh and eventually rescued his family and the people of God from famine. Esther rescued the Jews from a sanctioned slaughter by her enemies. Hosea eventually saved his wife from unfaithfulness and slavery and faithfully brought God's message to a wayward people. Daniel learned the ways of the Babylonians but never stopped worshipping the one true God. He became one of the highest advisors in the Babylonian court and received prophecies from God that still await fulfillment today. Mary endured the challenges of a pregnancy before marriage and traveled far with her husband to give birth to the child who would become Saviour of the world.

In what way has God intervened in your life lately? What is HE calling you to do or obey? In what area might you need to say "I am the Lord's servant?" Let it be to me according to His Word."

He might be calling you to learn contentment in your everyday life instead of always looking for something more exciting. He often calls us to step out of our comfort zones to do something we're not doing or to change something we are doing. He might be calling us to deeper prayer and dependence on Him after we've spent the last while desperately trying to fix everything ourselves. Or He might be calling you to leave behind everything that's familiar and follow Him to a different place or people or training to prepare for the His next step for your life. .

And for some of you, He calls you to stop avoiding Him. You have resisted His call for a long time. He just keeps calling because He has life and wants what's best but your stubborn pride has kept you from declaring that you will be His servant and you will trust in Him. Will you stop resisting and say yes to His call to day?

Will all of you now come before the Lord and spend some time in prayer responding to what He has said this morning – to pay attention to His interruptions – to listen to His still small voice? Come to Jesus who is great; the Son of the Most High; the king on the throne of his forefather David who reigns now and will forever. Your King. Your Lord. Your Saviour.